

# Civil War history comes to life

By LAKIN LAHE

Every student learns about the United States Civil War sometime during his or her history classes, but very rarely do they get to experience it first-hand. Oberlin students, however, have a clearer picture of the War Between the States thanks to Decatur Community High vo-ag teacher Jason Ketterl, a corporal in the Kansas Volunteer Infantry that re-enacts battles from the Civil War. Mr. Ketterl goes to Texas, Oklahoma, Missouri, Mississippi, Tennessee, and Arkansas to re-enact the Civil War. He has been doing this since 2002.

He recently gave a presentation to Trevor Williams' eighth grade history class. He showed the students slides and pictures, and even prepared food Civil War soldiers would have eaten for the kids to try. He madehardtack and johnnycakes for the students to eat, although this was not a pleasant experience, for these foods were very hard and limited on taste.

Mr. Ketterl also brought along some of the uniforms he wears, including worn-out boots, blankets, trousers, jackets, ammunition, and a bag with supplies. He explained the different parts of his uniform and supplies and also explained many things about the Civil War era.

"Did you know the beds during the Civil War were made tight so that bugs could be avoided outside?" Mr. Ketterl told the students. "The beds were made of random grasses, which had bugs in them. Thus we get the term: 'Sleep tight, don't let the bed bugs bite.'"

And did you know that during the Civil War era, glasses with colored lenses were used to treat disorders and illness? Yellow-tinted glasses were used to treat syphilis, blue for insanity, and pink for depression. Thus we get the phrase: "to see the world through rose-colored glasses." When you looked through them, supposedly, you became happy.

The vo-ag teacher became interested in the Civil War because of an old pistol his dad had. "I have always liked history, all types of history," said Mr. Ketterl. "My dad had a flintlock black powder pistol, and he let my brothers and I shoot it. I enjoyed it and liked how it was more of a challenge to shoot than a typical rifle. So, the time period that had the most black powder guns was the American Civil War."

He got started in the re-enactments by buying a black powder rifle and then shooting it every chance he got. "As I got better and better, I started looking for competition shoots," he said. "The only one in the area that was close was the Buck Skinners, which is a group of



JASON KETTERL shows the boots that are part of the uniform he wears during Civil War re-enactments.

people that portray the hunters and trappers of the pre-Civil War era. They dress like Daniel Boone and Davy Crockett."

Mr. Ketterl had his first competition shoot in Oberlin, but he was the only one with a Civil War style firearm. Wanting to compete with other people who had rifles like his, he put off this hobby for several years.

While in college in Manhattan, he got on the Internet and looked for information on black power shoots. He saw a web site called 1st Kansas Volunteer Infantry, and so he gave them a call and went to a live fire event with them in Lost Springs. "After a couple more events with this group, I became a member and started doing the re-enacting events like they did," Mr. Ketterl said.

During a re-enactment, the soldiers try to make it as authentic as possible by not only wearing uniforms and shooting old guns, but also by eating the same foods as Civil War soldiers would have eaten and sleeping out in the elements, even with snow on the ground.

The camping is one of Mr. Ketterl's favorite parts. "I love camping out in the elements and talking to all the different types of people who enjoy this activity," he said. "I also like to present this information to schools around Kansas. History

shouldn't just be read or watched on TV; one should experience it if they can."

The vo-ag teacher explained to the eighth graders that the conditions during the war were very harsh. The weather at times was extremely hot or cold, windy and muddy. Soldiers were very limited on supplies. Water was limited to 22 ounces every day, or sometimes two days.

Dishes consisted of a tin cup, usually rusty, a spork (spoon, knife, and fork all in one) and a tin container used to cook with. The extra supplies were usually very heavy but were carried in need.

Mr. Ketterl also explained that during the Civil War, if arms or legs were wounded or infected, they were amputated with a bone saw.

"I think that all the little stories about the individuals who fought in the Civil War are worth hearing," said Mr. Ketterl. "It is the stories they told, the lives they lived, the struggles they faced, and the character that these people had that interest me."

During one re-enactment, he explained that his company of Union soldiers was positioned in front of a battery position. A battery is four to six cannons. "The Confederates came out of a tree line, and the can-

nons only 30 feet behind us opened fire. We got pinned down because the cannons were behind us, and the Confederates were in front of us about 50 feet away. We dropped our guns, covered our ears and became prisoners.

"What makes this funny is right before we got put into this situation, we had spent about a day and a half not doing anything but working on entrenchments. Our company commander said that we should stretch our legs and go in front of the cannons because the 'Confederates would be idiots to attack the cannons head on.' We became the idiots. So, in short, I spent my whole weekend digging a trench and 5 minutes going deaf from cannon fire, and then I became a prisoner. What a weekend!"

Mr. Ketterl tries to make it to three events a year that are out of state. "Traveling is the most expensive and time consuming part of this hobby," said Mr. Ketterl. Most re-enactments are weekend battles, so he usually leaves either Thursday night or Friday morning to get to an event. Then he comes back Sunday night. "Hopefully, I'm ready for school on Monday," he said.

What are some of the challenges that come with his hobby? "Time," he explained. "Spare time is something I don't get a lot of being a parent, teacher, FFA sponsor, and coach, etc. Re-enacting can be very time consuming. I have to sit down with a calendar and decide what is important at what time and schedule things accordingly."

Another challenge is cost. "This is all on our own time and own budget," said Mr. Ketterl, "every level of it from private to General."

Currently, Mr. Ketterl is a corporal with his company. "This is my first year as corporal," he said. "I was elected this December. Usually most of us stay away from having rank because it means that we have to buy another uniform and more equipment."

Another disadvantage for Mr. Ketterl of being an officer is now he needs to make it to at least four events a year. "That can be hard for me to do," he said. He also has to read and learn "Casey's Infantry Tactics" manual because he will now have duties and assignments when he goes to re-enactments. "A private gets to show up, shoot some powder, and have no responsibilities," he explained.

In spite of the added responsibilities, Mr. Ketterl helps to bring history to life for many people. "I hope the students learn that there is more to history than just books, dates, and places. I want students to see how history has shaped their lives and that it is important to know."



By the DCHS Dictator Staff

## Practice makes perfect for contest

By MARCIMETCALF

Music contest is just around the corner - Saturday, March 31, in Oberlin.

Whenever someone plays or sings a solo at music contest people might think, "Oh, that was wonderful." But the song doesn't become perfect in one day. It takes a lot of time and practice to make a solo a 1 rating. It all starts before the students leave for Christmas Break.

The first thing to do is choose a solo. Sometimes this can take a long time because each student has different tastes in music, and it's hard to find a song that fits those tastes and styles.

It is up to the student how well the solo ends up and what rating he or she receives. It takes a lot of practice and dedication. Sometimes students want to do a solo, but they don't realize how much work it takes.

Christie Morris, Oberlin band director, and Susan Nelson, Oberlin music director, take time out of their busy days to give private lessons. During these lessons, the directors break the songs down so students can work on them more easily and more efficiently.

For instrumental soloists, after about six lessons Cheryl Metcalf, accompanist for instrumental solos, comes to the school to practice with the students.

Mary Jo Lohofener is accompanist for the vocal solos. She spends time at the high school practicing with Mrs. Nelson and the vocal soloists.

Mrs. Metcalf and Mrs. Lohofener play an important role in the soloists' performances, so they too have to spend many hours practicing at home.

The week before contest is "crunch time." A pre-contest performance is usually held the Tuesday before contest. This gives the soloists a chance to calm their nerves and play in front of a crowd.

The day of contest is a hectic one. A person may have a vocal solo and/or instrumental solo, as well as large group vocal ensembles and band ensembles. In addition to their solos, some students choose to participate in ensembles, which makes an even more stressful few months before contest.

Before the performance butterflies come, but after a few years playing or singing, it gets easier.

Once in the performance room, it is important to smile and stay confident. A judge rates each performance a I, II, III, IV, or V. A I is excellent, and V is poor.

When the solo is over, hopefully all the hard work paid off and the ratings are posted in the glass hallway. If you get a I, you go to state, and the routine begins again.

## School Menus

March 26-30

OBERLIN SCHOOLS

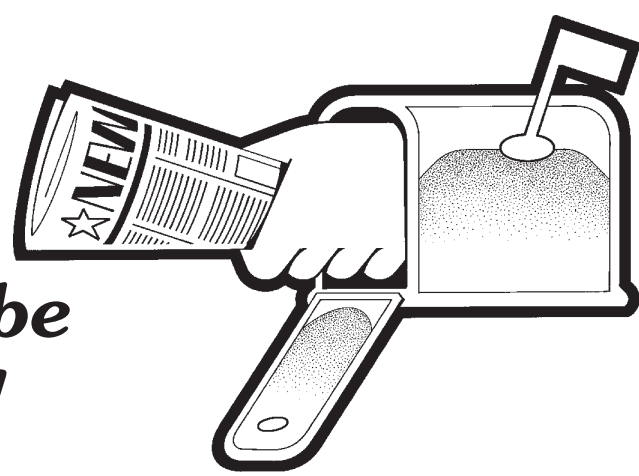
**Monday:** Breakfast: waffles, sausage patty. Lunch: burrito with cheese, green beans, Mandarin oranges. **Tuesday:** Breakfast: breakfast pizza. Lunch: hot beef sandwich, mashed potatoes with gravy. **Wednesday:** Breakfast: breakfast bites. Lunch: corn dog, carrots, Oreo pudding. **Thursday:** Breakfast: breakfast burrito. Lunch: popcorn chicken scalloped potatoes, strawberries. **Friday:** Breakfast: muffins. Lunch: tomato soup, grilled cheese.

Juice and fruit served with breakfast. Milk served with all meals. Choice bar served with all lunches.



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